



# TIDBITS

tips and helpful links

## Working Together to Provide What's Best for Students



It's the beginning of a new school year, and as a resource teacher you're probably wrestling with the dreaded scheduling dilemma—how to work around all the other demands being placed on a student's time throughout the school day. Add to that an increased caseload and fewer hours of assistance from a para, and the task may have gone from difficult to seemingly impossible!

The July 17, 2012 publication of *Education Week* featured a thought-provoking article written by Stephen Frank and Karen Hawley Miles that contains some ideas worth considering. Here's a portion of their article:

*Research tells us that the factors that most improve student learning are excellent teachers, high expectations, a rigorous curriculum aligned with standards, and instruction that is adjusted to meet specific student needs based on ongoing formative assessment of student progress against standards.*

*Imagine if we were to embrace a vision that blurred the distinctions between special education and general education, requiring all teachers to be experts in differentiated instruction and focusing special education dollars on delivering a higher quality of instruction.*

The article goes on to suggest the need for dual certification so that all teachers, working in teams, can successfully serve mixed classrooms where students are regrouped throughout the day to better target individual needs. These teacher teams would collaborate constantly, using data from ongoing formative assessments to guide their instruction. Such an approach would reduce the barriers that separate special and general education and give all students greater access to grade level curriculum.

The complete article can be found [here](#).

(Use **Ctrl/Click** to open all links)

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## More iPad Apps

Apple is reporting huge sales of its iPads to schools across the country. Both the low cost and the variety of free apps are contributing to record sales. Click to read the full article featuring Apple's CEO Tim Cook commenting on Apple's recent success.

While the iPad isn't appropriate for every learner, many teachers and parents are finding the device and the wide variety of apps available a beneficial tool in meeting specific needs. Click [here](#) for tips on features and how to customize the device. Then, to learn more about a new iPad app that helps students with ADD stay on task [click here](#).



## Technology on the Horizon

Do you ever wish that students would bring the same engagement and enthusiasm to classroom learning that they display in video-gaming? A Bill Gates-funded project is aiming to tap into that enthusiasm by providing students with high quality educational games that align to the new standards. These will be designed to supplement instruction as well as provide information on skill mastery, helping teachers track and modify instruction for individuals. Click [here](#) to read more... This idea of using video games as a springboard to learning is popping up in other parts of the country as well. Some schools in North Carolina have been experimenting with the concept for the last four years and are reporting great success in teaching math, science, literature and geography this way. To read more, click [here](#).

The Gates Foundation is also promoting the incorporation of UDL into general education classrooms. The Center for Applied Special Technology has received an \$800,000 grant dedicated to implementing UDL in sync with the standards in four selected districts. Both UDL and RTI are being considered for use on a broader scale, complimenting the Common Core because they are practices that allow students more options for demonstration of knowledge and provide targeted interventions that keep students from falling behind. The entire article is available at [Education Week](#). For more information and free multi-media tools using UDL, visit [CAST](#).



How much inclusion is going on in your district? With budgets stretched many districts are considering more inclusion for special needs students. A recent NPR Talk of the Nation program focused on this topic -- to hear the program or read the text of the conversation, click [here](#). Click [here](#) to listen to how inclusion impacted the success of Bridget Brown, a young adult with Down syndrome.

Another Gates-backed initiative is considering the impact of limited text display on the reading comprehension skills of students with learning disabilities. A Harvard astrophysicist with dyslexia discovered that reading text from the display on his iPhone allowed him better focus and understanding of print materials. Research is now underway to see if this discovery might have application to the field as a tool to help ameliorate reading decoding skills. To read more... [click here](#)

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## Implementing the Arizona Common Core Standards

The Arizona Common Core Standards are rolling out and the new PARCC assessments are slated for 2014-15 – just 3 years away! Whether you're a general education or special education teacher, knowledge and implementation of these new standards is essential to ensure your students are on track for college and career readiness. Both the general education assessment and the assessment for students in the 1% will be aligned to these standards. If you're curious about what's being considered for design and accommodations, [this article](#) offers some insight into the challenges designers are grappling with.

Since districts have limited opportunities to offer training, many teachers and grade level teams have taken the initiative and begun to explore and incorporate changes into their instruction and assessment. Taking a pro-active approach helps both teachers and students better clarify the intent of the new standards as they venture into more challenging and diverse methods and materials.

Providing ongoing training and support (as discussed in [this commentary](#)) for teachers is the key to successful implementation, and there are a multitude of websites devoted to helping teachers transition. If you're looking for creative lesson ideas aligned to the new standards, check out these sites:

<https://www.teachingchannel.org/videos/making-vocabulary-lesson-interactive>

<http://www.sharemylesson.com/>

[http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik\\_live\\_data/view.php?id=1833&record\\_id=269](http://www.coreknowledge.org/mimik/mimik_live_data/view.php?id=1833&record_id=269)

Join the conversation about implementing the AZ Common Core. [Click here](#) and [here](#) to get involved in nationwide collaboration among teachers to share ideas and resources.



## Improving Instructional Practices

One way to ensure that your students are learning grade level content is to establish practices that include learning progressions. Progress maps inform teacher's decisions about the effectiveness of their instruction in expanding the knowledge base for each student depending on their unique needs.

The study detailed in this [NCEO](#) document contains important implications for professional development including knowledge of content, shared expectations, proven instructional approaches, and building school leadership to provide the necessary support. With a shared vision and a collaborative effort all students benefit from grade level instruction carefully tailored to their needs.

Check this [webinar](#) from Eye on Education for guidance as you begin to implement the AZ Common Core Standards this school year. It details five shifts that you can focus on to better align your instruction with specific examples of lesson content that meet the objectives of the new standards. This is a great starting point as you begin to understand the depth and breadth of the changes underway.



## tips and helpful links

### News from NCSC

NCSC, the National Center and State Collaborative General Supervision Enhancement Grant, is one of two consortia building new alternate assessments based on alternate achievement standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Arizona, as one of the original 18 NCSC partner states, is centrally involved with the development of this new assessment. The goal of this project is to ensure that students in this population achieve increasingly higher academic outcomes and leave high school ready for a variety of post-secondary options including college and career. To that end NCSC is also developing curriculum, instruction, and professional development support for teachers. Some of these materials are scheduled to be released this fall.

The 24 state NCSC collaborative includes experts from special education, communication sciences, curriculum and instruction, and assessment working together to provide models for best practices. Among these best practices is ensuring that students are able to communicate what they know and can do. Teachers and related service providers will receive intensive training on communication strategies for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. In addition, NCSC will employ UDL elements in the design of their assessment to ensure the greatest accessibility options. The assessments will contain varying levels of complexity to meet the unique learning needs of this population of students.

Another area of focus for best practice is the use of learning progressions to help teachers understand how students with SCD learn, enabling them to utilize formative strategies and make instructional decisions that support greater learning.

To learn more about the NCSC collaborative, including the work being done by Community of Practice members in various states and newsletters detailing project work, visit:

[www.ncsepartners.org](http://www.ncsepartners.org)



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